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SUBJECT: NIGHT OF 1000 DINNERS RECEPTION RAISES FUNDS FOR NGO'S
FIGHT AGAINST LANDMINES

REF: SECSTATE 23284

¶1. (U) Summary: At a fundraising reception held as part of the Night of 1000 Dinners (reftel), Post helped raise over 4,000 USD for the Armenian Red Cross Society, a local NGO working to reduce landmine casualties through a Mine Risk Education program. The event drew more than 70 guests, including well-known political figures, influential businessmen, and owners of media outlets. This event increased awareness about the threat of landmines in Armenia and throughout the world, and raised funds for an important local NGO. End summary.

¶2. (U) While we had hoped for greater turnout by local business leaders, we were pleased that more than 70 government officials, politicians, NGO representatives, academics, members of the Diaspora, and local diplomatic mission staff attended the event. Some of the largest donations were contributed by such influential figures as the president and CEO of Hovnanian International, a U.S. company that is one of the largest real estate developers in Armenia; the director of H2 TV, a nationally broadcast private television station; and the leader of the Heritage Party, who is one of the most popular opposition leaders in the country. A number of individuals and NGOs associated with Armenia's humanitarian landmine effort also attended, including the MOD's head of engineering troops.

¶3. (U) In his remarks to the audience, the Charge d'Affaires stressed the importance of humanitarian landmine assistance in promoting regional and internal stability and economic development. He noted, "Clearing up mines and other dangerous residues of war is often the first step in reestablishing peace and stability....Because they remain armed and intact for decades, landmines have a long-term and far-reaching economic impact on entire societies." He also stated that, while landmine casualties have been decreasing, much more needs to be done, by governments, individuals and groups. After the Charge finished his remarks, UNDP Democracy and Governance Portfolio Coordinator Alla Bakunts presented an overview of the landmine situation in Armenia, and showed a video from the European Commission-funded "2005 Armenia Landmine Impact Survey." In addition, the secretary general of the Armenian Red Cross Society thanked the Embassy for organizing the reception, and stated that she hoped the event would further strengthen local collaboration.

4.(U) Afisha, one of Armenia's most popular magazines known for its coverage of glitzy events and elite life, will publish an article with a number of photos on the event. In addition, the Embassy distributed a press release, which was published by the government-run news agency, and which appears on the Embassy website. We hope that this positive press coverage will lead to increased participation in future fundraising events related to this issue.

GODFREY